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ABSTRACT

The bulk of communication research has approached competency from a trait perspective and has attempted to identify the individual characteristics that are presumed to generalize across all social settings. The role of social situation and the possibility that some individuals can be competent in some settings and incompetent in others have not been investigated throughly. A study was therefore undertaken to refine the theoretical base surrounding communication competency and to take preliminary steps toward exploring the relationship between competency and social situation. First, a set of 50 social situations was generated from open-ended communication diaries kept by 36 college students over a two-day period. This set was then narrowed to a sample of six situations by three raters and was evaluated in terms of (1) personal benefits/goals, (2) resistance, (3) intimacy, (4) apprehension, (5) homophily, (6) rights, and (7) dominance. Next, 296 students were asked to evaluate the situations using the seven criteria. Factor analysis indicated that while the emphasis placed upon a particular situation changed from situation to situation, "personal benefits/goals" and "resistance" accounted for the greatest amount of definitional variance. Discriminant analysis found "intimacy" and "apprehension" to best differentiate the six stimulus situations. (FL)

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Differentiating Among Social Situations: An Investigation into the Situational Element in Communication Competency

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Abstract

This study was designed to explore the role of social situation in defining communication competency. Undergirding the frameworks addressing competency is the contention that competency is the appropriate response to the demands of changing social situations. While acknowledging the important relationship between the situation and communication, the thrust of competency research has focused on the individual and attempted to identify the traits which are presumed to generalize across all settings. In the attempt to refine the theoretical base of communication competency, the present study took preliminary steps toward developing a situational framework. A population of social situations was generated from an open ended communication diary. The population of situations was narrowed to a sample of six stimulus situations through a sorting procedure. These six stimulus situations were evaluated in terms of seven criterial attributes: (1) personal benefits/goals, (2) resistance, (3) intimacy, (4) apprehension, (5) homophily, (6) rights, and (7) dominance. Results of factor analyses and factor comparisons indicated that while the emphasis placed upon a particular dimension changed from situation to situation, personal benefits/goals and resistance accounted for the greatest amount of definitional variance. Discriminant analysis found intimacy and apprehension to best differentiate the six stimulus situations and categorize them into three clusters. It was reasoned that these clusters reflect higher order situational forms. The key to understanding communication competency rests in understanding the communication which sustains and defines such forms. Recommendations for future research are provided.

Students of human communication have long been concerned with the nature of effective communication. Ancient scholars like Quintilian, were devoted to bene dicendi scientia, the science of speaking well. While Quintilian adopted the term "the good man speaking well" to describe the effective communicator, present theorists use the term "communication competency." Researchers from a variety of disciplines (linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and communication) are increasing their interest in explicating the domain of communication competency. Since it has been addressed from so many theoretical positions, competency has been defined and assessed in a variety of ways and assumed a number of conceptual meanings.

However, undergirding the many perspectives is the role that the social situation plays in demonstrating communication competency. That is, competency is described as the success of the individual to meet the communicative demands of a particular social situation. Yet, the bulk of the research operationalizes competency from a trait perspective and has attempted to identify the individual characteristics which are presumed to generalize across all social settings. The role of the social situation and the possibility that some individuals can be competent in some settings and incompetent in others has not been satisfactorily discussed. This study sought to refine the theoretical base surrounding communication competency and take preliminary steps toward exploring the relationship between competency and social situation.

Epistemological Underpinnings of Competency

Literature addressing competency tends to be anchored in four theoretical frameworks: linguistic, social perspective taking, skills, and goals. The structural position (Chomsky, 1965, Pylyshyn, 1973) is concerned with the mental capacity underlying actual behavior and as such, is not concerned with performance

or observable communication behavior. Generative grammar is the key to the structural position. Socio-linguists, on the other hand, (Hymes, 1971; 1972; Labov, 1968; Cazden, 1970b; Ervin-Tripp, 1968; Bock, 1968) argue that deep grammatical structure is important but also contend that it is necessary to study language in use (i.e. performance). A socio-linguistic position argues that language development and language use is inextricably intertwined with culture and environment. Language is affected by physical surroundings, people present, tasks being performed, topics of discussion, and previous events.

A second framework of competency is concerned with social perspective taking (Hale & Delia, 1976; Delia, 1977; Kelly, 1955; Crockett, 1965). Theorists within this vein suggest that an individual's sensitivity to a particular social situation enables him/her to attain competency. Delia suggests that sensitivity to a situation can be linked to the individual's cognitive complexity; cognitively complex individuals are more able to recognize and adapt to the requirements of changing social situations than less complex individuals.

A third approach has been concerned with the behavioral skills necessary to achieve communication competency. In explicating competency skills, research has advanced from two perspectives: one approach has sought to identify global indices of competency, while the other has been more concerned with specific behaviors. Global measures (e.g. Holland & Baird, 1968; Bienvenieu, 1971; D'Augelli, 1973; Hipple, 1972) have used summative scores on a variety of dimensions to reflect an overall assessment of an individual's ability to communicate. Other skill theorists have attempted to identify specific traits or behaviors necessary for competency. Bochner and Kelly (1974), for example,

identify (1) empathy, (2) descriptiveness, (3) owning feelings, (4) self-disclosure, and (5) behavioral flexibility as important competency traits. Cushman and Craig (1976) discuss listening, cuing, and negotiating. Many other skills have been identified in alternative research (cf. Foote & Cottrell, 1955; Argyris, 1965; Carkhuff, 1971; Bledsoe, 1976). While a great deal of research has been generated and a number of skills identified (e.g. empathy, listening, owning feelings, behavioral flexibility, self-disclosure) competency skills have been conceptualized and operationalized in a variety of ways. In addition, the bulk of this research has discussed skills independently of situations, implying that the skills appropriate for one situation are necessarily appropriate for all situations. Such an approach is restrictive, for as Cronen, Pearce, and Harris (1979) suggest:

> ...there is no communication act, regardless of its veneration in some contexts which is not in other contexts villainous in intent, awkward in execution... or disastrous in consequence (p. 33).

A fourth framework sees competency as an individual's ability to specify and obtain goals. Two tacks have been taken relative to goals and competency. One approach focuses on the individual's ability to control the environment in such a way to obtain personal goals and rewards (White, 1963; Argyris, 1965; Weinstein, 1969; Parks, 1977; Miller & Steinberg, 1975) while the other suggests that goal attainment must be relational; all participants in a communication encounter must be given an opportunity to mutually satisfy goals. Relational theorists, then, suggest that an individual's goal attainment at the expense of another is not a proper index of competency.

Several limitations render the goals approach problematic. One, goal attainment is seldom, if ever, conceptualized or operationalized in the literature; research has yet to explicate the types of goals individuals might pursue in the course of interaction. Some goals may be very conscious and clearcut while others may be subconscious and abstract. While suggesting that the ability to obtain goals, tasks, desires, or needs is central to competency, the literature has done little to outline their characteristics. This problem involves locating the operational definition of goal attainment; does the individual, the relationship, or a third party decide if a goal has been attained. A final problem concerns the temporal aspect of goal attainment. It is possible that an individual is quite capable of fulfilling short term goals, but incapable of fulfilling long term goals.

Undergirding the four frameworks of competency is a common theme; within each the importance of the social situation is recognized and each suggests that competency requires an individual to recognize, differentiate, and adapt to different social situations in order to obtain communication competency. Socio-linguists have discussed the relationship between social situations, language development, and language use (Hymes, 1967a, 1971, 1972; Labov, 1968; Cazden, 1970; Ervin-Tripp, 1968; Bock, 1968). The importance of adapting to a situation is central to social perspective taking (Hale & Delia, 1976; Kelly, 1955) since individuals must be sensitive (through traits like cognitive complexity) to the exigencies of a social situation and adopt the communication strategies demanded by it. Likewise, skill theorists (Argyle, Kendon, 1967; Bochner & Kelly, 1974; Cushman & Craig, 1976; Bledsoe, 1976) emphasize that competency resides in the individual's ability to call forth the skills necessary for effectiveness in a

particular situation. Similarly, the goals approach (Parks, 1977; Weimann, 1977; Brandt, 1978; and Cegala, 1978) stresses that goals must be attained by controlling the immediate social environment. The relationship between the social setting and communication competency is appropriately summarized by Parks:

> Competence is not so much a quality of an individual as a quality of interaction or communication with the surrounding environment. This implies that people can be competent in some situations and incompetent in others. (p. 21)

While acknowledging the importance of social situation, few substantive attempts have been made to incorporate the role of social situation in a conception of competence. However, an approach attempting to account for situational effects has great heuristic potential. The impact of social situations is dramatic and complex; as situations change, communication strategies must change if a person is to be effective. Thus, the role of the social situation should be an important aspect of a competency theory. As Birdwhistell (1970) argues:

> If we want to discuss social meaning of any particular element of behavior, if we want to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate behavior in a given scene, if we want to discuss how much information passes between membership, if we want to know whether effective accomplishment of therapeutic or educational purpose results from the interaction, or if we want to talk about effects of particular interaction upon participants in other situations--we must know a great deal about the nature of the social context within which the particular communication act takes place (pp. 97-99).

The Role of Social Situation in Communication Behavior

Literature addressing the relationship or interaction between situation and behavior can be useful in developing a situational account of communication

competency. In describing the processes individuals experience in adjusting to situations, Magnusson and Endler (1977), for example, outline two processes. First, individuals use the situation as a broad context for directing initial stages of behavior. At this level, the physical surroundings and the people present play an important role in behavior selection. Once the total situation is interpreted it can be modified and altered to fit the flow of behavior within the situation--the second process Magnusson and Endler discuss. Individuals monitor the behavior and actions of others and redefine expectations accordingly.

Situations may also be defined in terms of the amount of influence they impose upon behavior. Some situations may have a profound impact (the range of behavior occurring among people riding an elevator is limited) while other situations may carry less direct impact (during the first few days of a job, individuals are often confused and frustrated because they have not learned the rules for proper behavior). In abstract or vague situations, individuals draw upon past experience for guidance in making communication choices (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). Thus, the way individuals define social situations appears to be a key to understanding their influence in the communication process. It is in terms of the definition or interpretation that communication strategies are selected and implemented. As Hewes (1978) has recently argued, research discovering the ways in which individuals define social situations will make an important contribution to understanding communication behavior.

Perceptions of Situations

Research has attempted to delineate the ways in which a situation might be defined in several ways. Knapp (1978), for example, offers six

possible dimensions along which individuals define social situations: (1) formality (formality may be based on the structure of the physical environment or the status of the participants) (2) warmth (warmth involves feelings about the emotional climate) (3) familiarity (unfamiliar settings encourage caution) (4) constraint (the degree to which individuals feel free to emotionally or physically leave a particular situation) (5) privacy (communication exclusive to particular parties) and (6) distance (the physical or emotional distance created by the situation).

Theorists other than Knapp have attempted to trace the dimensions of social situations. Magnusson (1971) tested the dimensionality of 36 stimulus situations and found five defining factors: (1) those of a rewarding and positive character, (2) those of a negative character, (3) those of a passive character, (4) those involving social interaction, and (5) those involving activity.

Wish, Deutsch, and Kaplan (1976), using multidimensional scaling, identified four relational dimensions: (1) cooperative and friendly versus competitive and hostile, (2) equal versus unequal, (3) intense versus superficial, and (4) socioemotional and informational versus task oriented and formal.

Building on the previous study, Wish and Kaplan (1977) sought to determine the dimensions individuals use when participating in interpersonal communication. Again using multidimensional scaling, the authors located five factors individuals use in interpreting communication encounters: (1) cooperation, (2) intensity, (3) dominance, (4) formality, and (5) task orientation. These factors support the results of role relationship differentiation identified in Wish, Deutsch, and Kaplan (1976).

Forgas (1976) examined the social episodes housewifes and students experience in daily communication. Two dimensions, intimacy and self-confidence, were descriptive of the housewife sample. Three dimensions, pleasantness, involvement, and familiarity, defined the student population.

The first substantive attempt to uncover the dimensions of social situations and their relationship to communication was produced by Cody (1978) and Cody and Jordan (1979). Cody (1978) used multidimensional scaling procedures to assess the dimensions of "naturalistic" persuasive situations (e.g. persuading a group of people to go to a bar with you). Four dimensions were identified as pertinent to dyadic persuasive situations: (1) intimate versus superficial relationships, (2) intimate relationship--infringement of rights versus intimate relationship--negotiation, (3) infringement of rights versus special favors, and (4) personal benefits versus helping others.

Expanding on the research, Cody (1978), Cody and Jordan (1979) developed a conceptual model and empirical test of social situation categorization. Grounding their conceptualization in Cody (1978), Forgas (1976), Magnusson (1971), McCrosky, Daly, Richmond, and Falcione (1977), Wish, Deutsch, and Kaplan (1976), Wish and Kaplan (1976), Cody and Jordan proposed eight factors along which situations can be categorized: (1) apprehension, (2) homophily, (3) resistance to persuasion (hostility), (4) goal importance, (5) rights, (6) intimacy, (7) personal benefits, and (8) dominance.

To test the model, Cody and Jordan constructed a 47 item questionnaire, had subjects evaluate four stimulus situations constructed by the authors and submitted the data to factor analysis. The results supported seven of the

eight dimensions hypothesized; goal importance and personal benefits collapsed into a single factor. Cody and Jordan (1979), thus, provide the beginning of a conceptual model and an instrument for situational differentiation.

Additional research has addressed ways in which individuals perceive social situations. Pervin (1977) for example suggests that individuals define situations in affective terms (e.g. threatening, warm, interesting, dull, tense, calm, rejecting). These situational perceptions are organized in terms of outcomes; that is, individuals do not organize situations on cognitively perceived characteristics only, but also in terms of the behavior or communication associated with them. Some of the alternative dimensions used to describe situations include Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum's (1957) activity, evaluation, and potency dimensions; Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) emotion-eliciting qualities of environments; and Insel and Moos's (1974) dimensions of personal development, system maintenance and system change.

Probing the relationship between social situation definition and communication behavior, will contribute to a more substantive theory of communication competency. It is important, however, not to assume a cause and effect relationship: that is, a competency theory ought not view the social situation as the stimulus and communication behavior as the response. Rather a model of competency should take an interactive stance and consider the initiation and direction of communication behavior to come from the continuous interaction between a person and the situations they encounter. Such an interactive approach is isomorphic with current transactional thought and communication and, thus, able to explain why an individual might be competent in some situations and incompetent in others. In the present study, communication competency is as described as a BEST FIT between the characteristics of the individual and the demands of the situation. According to Pervin

(1968), a match or best fit between the characteristics of the individual and the environment expresses itself in high satisfaction, high performance, and lack of stress in the system; a lack of fit results in decreased performance, dissatisfaction, and stress in the system.

Rationale and Research Questions

As demonstrated earlier, the rationale for this study is that competency theory will advance only when research accounts for the ways in which social situation definition impacts upon behavior. Traditional research in communication competency has maintained a primary focus on the individual and has attempted to discuss competency as a characteristic that can be generalized cross situationally. Yet, individuals may be competent in some situations and incompetent in others; that is, some individuals may be able to obtain a best fit given one set of situational characteristics but not in others. Before this can be established, however, research needs to establish how dimensions of social situation are perceived and how communication differs across them. Once a typology of social situations is established, it will be possible to determine the types of communication strategies necessary for individuals to maximize their communication activities. This study, therefore, attempted to explicate social situations in terms of the following research questions:

1. Will a set of stimulus situations be perceived differently?
2. What dimensions will individuals use in defining the set of stimulus situations?
3. What dimensions are used to differentiate the set of stimulus situations?

Method

To determine the definitional characteristics of a set of stimulus situations, the present study proceded in three interrelated stages. First, a population of situations was obtained through the use of an open ended communication diary. The second stage required a panel of raters to narrow the population of situations into a manageable and representative sample. The final stage asked a second sample of subjects to evaluate the stimulus situations in terms of criterial attributes.

Stage I: Diary

Pervin (1976), Delia and Grossberg (1977), and Forgas (1976) have suggested the use of free response methods to capture descriptions of phenommena in a subjects social environment. The diaries thus, yielded descriptions of (1) the overall communication situation, (2) the physical setting, (3) the interpersonal relationship, and (4) the interpersonal function (the purpose of the interaction). Thirty-six subjects from a large midwestern university were asked to keep the diary for a 48 hour period. To increase the variety of situations, the diaries spanned an eight day period. The sample was divided into four subsamples, each consisting of nine subjects responsible for one 48 hour period.

Twenty-seven diaries, nine for the first 48 hour block, and six for each of the remaining blocks were returned, generating 228 completed situations. From these, 50 were randomly selected for stage two of the study.

Stage II: Sorting Procedure

Three raters were asked to judge each situation in terms of its similarity with a marker situation randomly selected from the 50 stimulus situations.

The raters sorted the situations into one of seven piles. Thus, each situation could obtain a score from 1 to 7 with a low score indicating the situation was similar to the marker and a high score indicating the situation was not similar to the marker. The final six stimulus situations were the marker situation and its most similar counterpart, two moderately similar situations and two dissimilar situations.

The situation ("You are engaged in a conflict with your roommate over a dog he/she wants to bring home") was selected as the marker situation. Results of the sorting procedure indicated the situation, ("You are in your apartment. You are engaged in an emotional conflict with your boyfriend/girlfriend over whether you should go to the theatre or whether you should stay home and study. You want to go to the theatre, but your boyfriend/girlfriend thinks you should stay home and study") received the highest similarity score. The highest dissimilarity scores were given to the situations: ("You are at your grandparents house. You are talking about various topics after delivering their groceries") and ("You are visiting your old high school. While there, you socialize with a close friend you have not seen in a long time.") The two medium situations were: ("You are in a stairway outside of class. You are trying to console a friend who is frustrated over a class he/she is not doing well in") and ("You are riding a bus across town on a rainy day. You are discussing how much fuel prices have increased in the past few years with an acquaintance"). These six situations, then served as the six stimulus situations.

Stage III: Situation Definition

The final stage of the study asked a second sample of subjects (n=296) to evaluate the situations using the seven criterial attributes identified

in Cody and Jordan (1979). A 30 item instrument was adapted from Cody and Jordan (1979) referencing (1) apprehension, (2) homophily, (3) resistance, (4) personal benefits/goals, (5) intimacy, (6) rights and (7) dominance.

While it is likely that this instrument does not tap all of the many ways a situation may be defined, it does represent an adequate synthesis of the dimensions identified in previous literature.

All subjects were contacted by the experimenter during a scheduled class meeting and given the test booklets. The average time required to complete the questionnaire was 30 minutes.

Statistical Analysis

To assess the underlying structure of variables defining each situation, a principal factors factor analysis was performed on the data. This analysis utilized an orthogonal varimax rotation and an eigenvalue cutoff of 1.0. A scree procedure was used in determining the most appropriate factor solution for each situation. A factor loading was considered significant if it had a primary loading of .60 and a secondary loading not larger than .40.

To test the similarity in the dimensionality across the six stimulus situations, factor comparisons (Veldman, 1967) were performed on the six factor solutions.

To probe the ways in which the six stimulus situations were differentiated, discriminant analysis was performed. In the present study, the discriminant model input factor scores generated from an overall factor analysis. A factor score is a variate which is a function of a linear combination of the variables defining each dimension in the factor structure. Thus, in the present study, discriminant analysis was used to differentiate the six

situations in terms of the seven criterial dimensions. This procedure indicated the relative weight of each dimension in differentiating the six groups. The step wise model selected for this purpose employed Wilks Lambda to determine the discriminating power of each factor score. All significance tests employed a .05 alpha level.

Results

The instrument used to assess the definitional characteristics of the six stimulus situations proved to be reliable. To assess the internal consistency of the factors, alpha coefficients were computed on the items referencing the seven dimensions. The reliabilities were: (1) apprehension (.82), (2) homophily (.74), (3) resistance (.90), (4) goals/benefits (.87), (5) rights, (.73), (6) dominance (.75), and intimacy (.85). Of these dimensions homophily was potentially the most spurious with only two items; therefore, the correlation of the two items is presented as the most reasonable estimate of their relationship. Overall, the instrument maintained a high degree of internal consistency.

Factor Analysis and Factor Comparisons

The first research question asked if the six stimulus situations were perceived differently while the second asked which dimensions defined the six stimulus situations. These research questions were answered in terms of the factor analyses and factor comparisons. Examination of the individual factor solutions indicated that the six stimulus situations were indeed perceived differently. The factor comparisons indicated that while the emphasis placed upon a particular dimension differed from situation to situation, the seven criterial dimensions were highly stable across the six situations.

In terms of the factor analyses, situation 1 (concerned with two friends visiting their high school) yielded a five factor solution.

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Insert Table 1

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Personal benefits/goals emerged as the dominant factor in terms of explained variance (20%), followed by intimacy (10.9%), resistance (7.1%), apprehension (5.7%), and rights (4.0%).

Situation 2 (concerned with a bus ride with an acquaintance) yielded a six factor solution.

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Insert Table 2

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Personal benefits/goals was again the dominant factor in terms of explained variance (16.6%, followed by resistance (10.8%), apprehension (7.3%), rights (6.3%), intimacy (4.6%), and dominance (3.9%).

A five factor solution was generated from situation 3 (a conflict between a boyfriend and girlfriend over whether they should stay home or attend a film)

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Insert Table 3

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personal benefits/goals was also the dominant factor in terms of explained variance in the third situation (16%) with resistance (13%), intimacy (8.2%), apprehension, (6.1%), and rights (4.7%) following in importance.

Situation 4 (concerned with a conflict between two roommates over a stray dog one wants to bring home) yielded a six factor solution.

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Insert Table 4

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Personal benefits/goals emerged once more as the dominant factor in terms of explained variance (17.1%) while resistance (12%) apprehensive (7.6%), rights (7.3%), intimacy (5.2%) and homophily (3.3%) followed in definitional importance.

A six factor solution defined situation 5 (a visit to grandparents).

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Insert Table 5

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Resistance explained the most variance (20.7%). Personal benefits/goals (12.1%), intimacy (9.3%), rights (7.3%), apprehension (4.7%), and homophily (3.3%) followed in importance.

The final situation (one individual consoling a frustrated friend) yielded a five factor solution with personal benefits/goals the dominant factor. Factor 1 concerned with personal gains explained 19.2% of +6 variance.

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Insert Table 6

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Intimacy was the second factor (12.1%) resistance was the third (8.1%), rights was the fourth (5.5%), with apprehension the fifth factor (4.6%).

Factor Analysis Interpretation

The results of the factor analyses, indicated that the specific dimension used to define the six stimulus situations were perceived

differently. While the situations were primarily defined by personal benefits/goals, the amount of variance ranged from 20% to 12% (see table 7). Resistance was also a dominant factor in terms of explained variance, ranging from 20.0% to 7.1%. Following personal benefits/goals and resistance in terms of definitional importance were intimacy, apprehension and rights. Homophily and dominance did not emerge as important definitional characteristics examined in this study. The impotence of dominance is particularly intriguing since it is a central construct to relational theorists (e.g. Ericson & Rogers, 1973; Millar & Rogers, 1976; Fisher, 1979).

The six stimulus situations were perceived differently in all situations, personal benefits/goals and resistance carried more definitional impact than the other dimensions. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that for most situations individuals assess the benefits to be obtained and then compare them against the amount of resistance that must be confronted in order to obtain them. This is consistant with the conclusions of Homans, (1961), Thibaut and Kelly (1959), Miller & Steinberg, (1975), Parks, (1977), Weinstein, (1969).

Discriminant Analysis

Results of the factor comparisons indicated a high similarity in the dimensions across the six situations, with the following range in coefficients across the situations: (1) personal benefits/goals (.96/.95); (2) apprehension (-.90/.99); (3) resistance (.95/.99); (4) rights (-.92/.99) and (5) intimacy (.80/.99). The emphasis placed upon a particular dimension, however, changed as the situations changed. This similarity provided a

warrant for generating factor scores from an overall factor analysis and inputting them into a discriminant model used to address the third research question. By inputting factor scores into the discriminant analysis it was possible to determine which combination of the seven dimensions best differentiated the six stimulus situations. The discriminant analysis indicated that each of the factor scores significantly discriminated the six situations ($< .05$ with 7 and 1776 degrees of freedom). Since Cooley and Lohnes (1967) suggest that two discriminant functions provide the most meaningful insight into group differences, two functions (intimacy and apprehension) which accounted for 56% and 25% of the discriminating variance respectively are interpreted.

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Insert Table 8

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While the results of the discriminant analysis indicated that the groups were statistically different a more descriptive finding involves the plots of the group centroids.

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Insert Table 9

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Discriminant Analysis Interpretation

In terms of intimacy and apprehension, situations 1, 5, and 6 clustered together, indicating they are being defined similarly. It seems reasonable then, to hypothesize that the communication patterns occurring within these situations will be similar. Likewise situations 3 (conflict between girl/boy

friends) and situation 4 (conflict between roommates) were also defined similarly and thus, may require similar communication pattern. Finally, situation 2 (ride on a bus with an acquaintance) was isolated as different from the other two clusters on the two discriminant functions, reflecting perhaps a third type of communication pattern. Each cluster may require a different communication behavior and to be competent may require the type of communication appropriate to the category.

While these findings are only preliminary because they are based on a limited domain of situations and evaluative dimensions, it may nevertheless be useful to consider these categories hypothetically, as representative of a greater or higher order situational form. Eventually, the essence of communication competency may be found in understanding the communicative demands imposed by these higher order situational forms.

Situational form has been addressed at great length by Duncan (1962) who suggests that an understanding of human interaction requires understanding the form that it takes. He suggests that a "sociological theory of social action can be created only if we show how form, as well as contents of symbolic expression are /sic/ used to create and sustain social order." (p. xvii) According to Duncan, then, individuals come to develop expectations about communication in terms of situational form. Consider the types of form identified in the present study.

The first situational form involves situations 1 (visiting a close friend), 5 (visiting grandparents), and 6 (consoling a friend). Each of these situations is similar in terms of intimacy and apprehension, a similarity captured by the label Social Intimate. This situational form

tends to involve relationships and occurs in physical settings which allow and, in fact require the demonstration of a certain degree of intimacy. Intimacy here is concerned with the degree to which each participant uses the other as a source of self-confirmation (Millar and Rogers, 1971). Affect displays, self disclosure and physical touch are important to this form (Villard & Whipple, 1976). Furthermore, since this form involves relationships which have a history, unique rules allowing the demonstration of solidarity are used (Morton, Alexander, & Altman, 1976).

Competency in the Social Intimate form occurs then, when interactants participate in that communication necessary to comfortably maintain the social form. Some self-disclosure is probably important as is physical touch and utilization of symbols and forms of address which clearly indicate solidarity.

A second situational form to emerge in the study involves situation 3 (a conflict between a boyfriend and girlfriend over a theatre date) and situation 4 (a conflict between roommates over a stray dog). The similarities between these two situations can be captured by the label Intimate Conflict. This situational form involves a slightly higher degree of intimacy than the Social Intimate form and also a higher level of apprehension. Competency in terms of this form would parrallel Deutsch's (1969) discussion of productive conflict which suggests that effective conflict management occurs when participants focus on the issues creating the conflict and develop methods for mutually resolving it.

A third type of situational form is reflected in situation 2 (riding an a bus across town with an acquaintance) which will be labeled Phatic

Socializing. In terms of the first two discriminant functions, intimacy and apprehension, this situation is considered the least intimate, but moderately apprehensive. Communication within this situation will likely involve few affect displays and little self-disclosure. Rather, interaction probably involves friendly chatter with the purpose of passing time and validating the presence of others. This type of situational form has been labeled "Phatic Communion" by Malinoski (1947).

Competency in this type of situation is measured by an individual's ability to engage in the appropriate social amenities. Such amenities are concerned with a desire to show interest and concern for the other. Turn taking is important in this situation, since each participant should have an opportunity to share in the dialogue. As Weimann (1977) suggests, too much or too little interaction on the part of the participant can be considered incompetent. The individual who talks too much and dominates the interaction is considered egotistical and overbearing and the individual who is quiet and uncommunicative is considered aloof and uncaring. The key then, to this type of situation involves the use of appropriate turn taking and turn yielding signals (Duncan & Niederehe, 1974). Thus, competency occurs when an individual is capable of engaging in idle chatter in a friendly way.

Thus, a key to communication competency rests with the ability of the individual to adapt to the requirements of a particular situational form. Three such forms, each requiring different communication strategies, were tentatively described in the present study: Social Intimate, Intimate Conflict, and Phatic Socializing. While both the three forms and the relationship between situational form and communication competency suggested

in this study are hypothetical, they illustrate a direction future research should go. Building a competency theory may depend upon the explication of the higher order situational forms. With their identification it will be possible to identify the strategies that will allow individuals to maximize their communication activities.

While adapting to the requirements of a situational form defines communication competency, it is important not to assume a cause and effect relationship and consider a situation, the stimulus and communication behavior the response. Such a perspective easily leads one to assume that the individual who has the "traits" of competency will always respond competently to the situation. It is more reasonable to conceive of competency as a choice making activity. In many cases, an individual may choose to perform competently or choose not to perform competently. Incompetency occurs for three principal reasons: (1) the individual does not recognize the requirements of the situational form and, therefore, cannot adapt to it; (2) the individual recognizes the form, but chooses not to respond to it because the payoff is too low or the resistance too high; and (3) the individual recognizes the situational form, but does not have the necessary communication skills to respond appropriately. When conceived in this manner, competency becomes an interactive capacity or process rather than an individual trait. This does not mean that individual differences are not important, however, for they certainly are. A situational framework, though, offers an alternative conception which can explain how some individuals are competent in some situations and incompetent in others. Individual differences come into play in terms of the choices available. Competency, then, is a function of the

appropriate response to a specific situational form and is not necessarily a trait that transcends all situational forms. The three forms identified in this study were Social Intimate, Intimate Conflict, and Phatic Socializing, each requiring a different set of interactional patterns. Since competency is best conceived as a choice making activity, an individual can be competent in some situations (e.g. Social Intimate) and quite incompetent in other forms. For as Little (1972) has demonstrated, some individuals specialize in certain aspects of the environment. Therefore, some individuals may specialize in some situational forms and stumble through others. Likewise it is possible that an individual can be competent in a variety of forms.

Summary

The development of a theory of communication competency is an important and significant endeavor for theorists of human communication. Continued research, therefore, is crucial to the development of a theory of communication competency. This research, however, must move away from the limiting preoccupation with traits and toward a situationally based framework. Competency in the present study is characterized as a "best fit" that is attained through the appropriate symbolic interaction within the demands of a particular situational form. That is, competent interaction involves the generation of message strategies appropriate to a particular situational form. Rather than being concerned with the characteristics of a competent communicator, then a situational framework focuses on the requirements of competent interaction. Central to the development of such a framework is a continued effort to develop situational typologies. Understanding the communication that sustains, defines, and differentiates a wide spectrum of communication forms will do much to advance a communication competency theory.

Definitional Scales

1.	I would feel uneasy in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I would not feel uneasy in this situation
2.	I would feel apprehensive in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I would not feel apprehensive in this situation
3.	I would feel tense in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I would not feel tense in this situation
4.	I would not feel nervous in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I would feel nervous in this situation
5.	The person in this situation and I are not very similar to each other	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	The person in this situation and I are very similar to each other
6.	The person in this situation is not like me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	The person in this situation is like me
7.	I feel the person in this situation would be easy to persuade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	The person in this situation would be difficult to persuade
8.	I feel the person in this situation would not be resistant to my persuasion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I feel the person in this situation would be resistant to my persuasion
9.	I think the person in this situation would be agreeable to my persuasion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I think the person in this situation would not be agreeable to my persuasion
10.	I would not have trouble in persuading the person in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I would have trouble persuading the person in this situation
11.	I could talk the person in this situation into doing something very easily	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I could not talk the person in this situation into doing something very easily

12.	A very important goal does not exist for me in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	A very important goal exists for me in this situation
13.	My goals are very important to me in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	My goals are not very important to me in this situation
14.	I do not personally benefit from this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I personally benefit from this situation
15.	I will benefit personally from this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I will not benefit personally from this situation
16.	I personally would get a lot out of it if successful in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I personally would not get a lot out of it if successful in this situation
17.	I personally gain if successful in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I personally do not gain if successful in this situation
18.	It would be to my personal advantage to be successful in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	It would not be to my personal advantage to be successful in this situation
19.	This situation involves a superficial relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	This situation does not involve a superficial relationship
20.	This situation involves a shallow relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	This situation does not involve a shallow relationship
21.	This situation involves a personally meaningless relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	This situation does not involve a personally meaningless relationship
22.	This situation involves a personally important relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	This situation involves a personally unimportant relationship
23.	I have no justification for making a request in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I have justification for making a request in this situation

24.	I have no reasonable grounds for making a request in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I have reasonable grounds for making a request in this situation
25.	The person in this situation is infringing on my rights	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	The person in this situation is not infringing on my rights
26.	The person in this situation usually dominates me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	The person in this situation does not usually dominate me
27.	I am usually submissive to the person in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I am not usually submissive to the person in this situation
28.	This situation involves an impersonal relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	This situation does not involve an impersonal relationship
29.	I do not have a right to make a request in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I have a right to make a request in this situation
30.	I am not warranted in making a request in this situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	I am warranted in making a request in this situation

Table 1

Rotated Principal Factor Solution for Situation #1

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
1	.02347	.25716	.08140	.82133*	.03574
2	-.09000	.17592	.01612	.74918*	.04232
3	.03216	.21485	.05062	.84496*	.06496
4	.11622	.08470	.09871	.26382	.07044
5	.06551	.55021	.11738	.26095	-.13718
6	.11339	.57925	.13199	.27315	-.10887
7	.01243	-.00976	.58038	.10699	.10092
8	.03660	.16145	.67066*	.01156	.05055
9	.13806	.18488	.81485*	.02735	.01491
10	.08816	.06132	.83561*	.09268	.11414
11	.10521	.09831	.64229*	.14419	.10679
12	.47167	.10281	.04227	-.01514	.28087
13	.44095	.01129	.04182	-.00238	.15378
14	.62566*	.25395	.04072	.02773	.14877
15	.59445*	.14327	.06850	.08256	.07659
16	.83363*	.02293	.06892	-.01669	-.00715
17	.87558*	.01284	.07947	.04267	.03085
18	.80369*	-.02930	.00845	-.03933	-.03806
19	-.01000	.51763	.07810	.11182	.20199
20	.05086	.72067*	.05323	.11149	.20918
21	.05198	.71567*	.03057	.09128	.25910
22	.24676	.45854	.09168	.01692	.10538
23	.15398	.19839	.05138	.01361	.72780*
24	.11428	.24292	.04647	.03223	.67926*
25	.09265	.40685	.07099	.06867	.26126
26	-.07113	.02488	.23516	.27857	.16411
27	-.00445	.06088	.15793	.20585	.16355
28	-.01056	.40430	.06242	.14757	.19501
29	.13039	.19520	.16722	.18656	.66783*
30	.17895	.09784	.21502	.15251	.63894*
Eigenvalue	6.00120	3.05965	2.13663	1.71330	1.20775
% Common Variation	20.0	10.9	7.1	5.7	4.0
Total	47.7				

Table 2

Rotated Principal Factor Solution for Situation #2

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
1	-.04320	.01860	.85378*	-.06814	.01012	.12757
2	.01146	.02275	.81746*	-.06239	-.06475	.04183
3	.00325	.09501	.86949*	.07249	-.03140	.11622
4	.06038	.12294	.26662	.05877	.03097	.10348
5	.03295	.30226	.21462	-.09526	.19969	.09127
6	.05282	.28602	.24394	-.05420	.30693	.07862
7	.14737	.58626	.13474	.10608	.02258	.00844
8	.03790	.65098*	-.05053	.01143	-.13438	.04921
9	-.02199	.83404*	.03448	.02172	.14451	.00629
10	.08525	.84838*	.05013	-.01987	-.05094	.04826
11	.06111	.70338*	.07791	.12163	.10641	.02396
12	.38541	.03765	.00825	.12614	.34553	-.12465
13	.42289	.06634	.00936	.08280	.26361	-.00285
14	.64522*	-.05378	.08205	.13532	.23003	.05476
15	.73462*	.05689	.08615	.08002	.13401	-.02885
16	.81090*	.06861	-.04062	.04007	.13106	-.05638
17	.84896*	.08658	-.03114	.05483	.06661	.02355
18	.64485*	.12101	-.02856	.06731	.02583	-.09758
19	.00442	-.04429	-.08778	.16524	.42241	-.06720
20	.18154	.04225	.09664	.08562	.65287*	-.07223
21	.16821	.06955	-.01036	.05407	.75301*	.07834
22	.30929	.12427	.01680	.07757	.56266	-.04258
23	.15643	.01411	.04406	.72650*	.26754	.03607
24	.17092	-.01170	.04383	.74703*	.26405	-.00677
25	-.06976	.02029	.15613	.03923	-.03884	.02713
26	-.05724	.07257	.10125	-.01573	-.12581	.92082*
27	.00447	.06483	.11200	-.04813	-.01918	.72536*
28	.11960	-.06071	-.05466	.14664	.37017	-.09941
29	.07714	.08793	-.00387	.74826*	.05895	.03000
30	.06326	.07208	-.04814	.69973*	.03093	-.05204
Eigenvalue	4.98827	3.24056	2.19469	1.91950	1.38813	1.19734
% Common Variance	16.6	10.8	7.3	6.3	4.6	3.9

49.7 Total

Table 3

Rotated Principal Factor Solution for Situation #3

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	
1	-.03176	.09937	.00919	.88133*	-.00766	
2	-.03188	.14641	-.09305	.81271*	.00045	
3	-.10251	.15444	-.14520	.75634*	-.07949	
4	-.05934	.06221	.08810	.42421	-.02800	
5	.07832	.08684	.62047*	.09178	-.07373	
6	.00411	.01747	.56614	.13327	-.11771	
7	.07041	.77354*	-.05437	.09669	-.07206	
8	-.01899	.77740*	.06132	.02735	-.02703	
9	.02844	.79198*	.05958	.07729	-.02216	
10	.04613	.86156*	-.00405	.14705	.02242	
11	.09413	.76702*	.02507	.09326	-.06818	
12	.60875*	-.13427	.12421	-.07055	.12235	
13	.59398*	-.04381	.14800	-.02655	.06727	
14	.66506*	-.00821	.26766	-.05074	.14341	
15	.64612*	.02646	.12112	-.00691	.06365	
16	.79908*	.12707	-.04629	-.04442	.15079	
17	.79427*	.12157	-.07798	-.01346	.07888	
18	.69917*	.12183	-.14260	-.02417	.14479	
19	-.07403	-.10965	.60135*	-.04669	.17571	
20	.06346	.02904	.72852*	-.02246	.21005	
21	-.01132	-.07531	.54716	-.07412	.28090	
22	.26038	.07777	.45137	-.15033	.08115	
23	.33171	.02564	.15953	.00074	.67888*	
24	.26734	.00576	.20956	-.01587	.74932*	
25	-.28583	.14779	.08389	.15712	.07040	
26	-.07830	.29139	-.10418	.12402	.18541	
27	-.06759	.23708	-.03252	.04080	.20681	
28	.04711	-.03628	.38019	-.07295	.19649	
29	.06784	-.01582	.13793	-.04373	.71995*	
30	.16384	-.02748	.12602	-.08146	.61543*	
Eigenvalue	4.84309	3.91649	2.48122	1.84379	1.42764	
% Common Variation	16.0	13.0	8.2	6.1	4.7	48.3 Total

Table 4

Rotated Principal Factor Solution for Situation #4

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	
1	-.05693	.02135	.92266*	.00894	.06392	.08085	
2	-.08170	.08908	.79762*	-.03779	-.03044	.05997	
3	-.11299	.06555	.90059*	-.03058	.00585	.07038	
4	.05942	.16200	.44523	-.03929	.01394	-.00087	
5	-.07278	.12949	.08029	-.04291	.21764	.83288*	
6	-.05777	.10193	.12289	-.01568	.22897	.86880*	
7	-.06630	.74195*	.10256	-.07347	-.00452	.01801	
8	-.08105	.66885*	.00042	-.09473	-.02342	.06245	
9	-.10635	.87729*	.09649	.04859	.06136	.11190	
10	-.13979	.78279*	.09323	.00499	-.05041	.04672	
11	-.06920	.77346*	.12241	.03550	.07538	.00280	
12	.49292	-.12477	-.12063	.17213	.06742	.09286	
13	.52827	-.19289	.01751	.09984	.08962	-.08409	
14	.64937*	.05209	.02129	-.00319	.17452	-.00555	
15	.70151*	-.00479	.03760	-.04503	.17529	-.16579	
16	.82073*	-.09027	-.03084	.10701	-.01180	-.01602	
17	.76910*	-.09637	-.06916	.23944	-.11523	.04389	
18	.73819*	-.10297	-.05585	.20776	-.04187	-.02022	
19	.02349	.03703	.07821	.07909	.57258	.11436	
20	.05377	.00459	.02572	.17854	.70392*	.13869	
21	-.01752	-.04179	-.09109	.22007	.75163*	.02000	
22	.20978	.00193	-.03018	.07788	.49477	.03320	
23	.20685	-.06265	-.07836	.73193*	.20409	-.08758	
24	.21258	-.01696	-.07805	.75406*	.24131	-.04941	
25	-.16628	.13627	.08482	-.21745	.13286	.06659	
26	.00236	.05305	.13452	.28831	.18788	-.00601	
27	.01532	-.02224	.09956	.34144	.22740	-.00679	
28	.03045	.02142	.01144	.22994	.39667	.12228	
29	.09605	-.00836	-.05151	.76124*	.10315	.02128	
30	.14617	-.02457	-.10628	.62997*	.09260	.06178	
Eigenvalue	5.13190	3.60246	2.30519	2.21022	1.56151	.99302	
% Common Variance	17.1	12.0	7.6	7.3	5.2	3.3	52.6 Total

Table 5

Rotated Principal Factor Solution for Situation #5

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
1	.03760	.09588	.16806	.08974	.86853*	.15153
2	.07145	.03322	.13828	.12281	.74494*	.14437
3	-.01359	.04531	.09214	.05833	.91601*	.16637
4	.03266	.08818	.11813	-.02206	.27246	-.14624
5	.12023	.15894	.14747	-.00169	.13862	.88193*
6	.21180	.22054	.25366	.06189	.22296	.61442*
7	.83825*	.06746	-.02917	-.04265	.01707	.04096
8	.80029*	.02620	.08042	.00948	-.00251	.07171
9	.09435*	.08674	-.00667	.06153	.03418	.06734
10	.88677*	.10421	.01623	.08583	.08984	.05084
11	.78596*	.22411	.11732	.06082	.03583	.04443
12	.05855	.49359	.00033	.22526	-.01949	.16126
13	.14788	.48154	-.10396	.01352	.03256	.13904
14	.03964	.56976	.23428	.22471	.02928	.16909
15	.12617	.52115	.12102	.18631	.01436	.03267
16	.04053	.81675*	-.01909	-.09902	.08474	-.04674
17	.01997	.88115*	.07439	-.04730	.11816	-.01671
18	.08909	.82564*	-.02903	.03785	.06626	-.02476
19	-.06980	-.03400	.62856*	.12399	.12793	.09763
20	.07421	.04263	.81141*	.15488	.12956	.16874
21	.03148	-.01013	.84163*	.13141	.09295	.04617
22	.03587	.22120	.51691	.07780	.16196	-.03051
23	.00583	.16713	.26780	.81572*	.04970	-.01957
24	.00432	.18099	.25731	.81609*	.05134	.02593
25	.06900	.08765	.57706	.23807	-.00254	.06749
26	.15362	-.13495	.29673	.24643	.09968	-.06705
27	.04396	-.15811	.17726	.10470	.14268	-.08148
28	-.00694	-.01265	.48688	.16430	.05941	.04339
29	.11269	.05252	.22931	.77968*	.10844	.02173
30	-.00837	.04108	.20440	.76609*	.04850	.05333
Eigenvalue	6.23279	3.65174	2.78255	2.19543	1.42217	1.00191
% Common Variance	20.7	12.1	9.3	7.3	4.7	3.3 57.6 Total

Table 6

Rotated Principal Factor Solution for Situation #6

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
1	-.04085	.06178	.21630	.05955	.90440*
2	-.02500	.06210	.17580	.02480	.71685*
3	-.05045	.05114	.23284	.08424	.83418*
4	.09596	-.01665	.27303	.08416	.34999
5	.10790	.34430	-.04474	.04408	.18689
6	.05357	.39177	.05124	.22776	.20849
7	-.07616	.02254	.69434*	.14692	.21416
8	-.02556	.00965	.68255*	.05869	.14710
9	.10398	.01852	.88726*	.05342	.13762
10	.14105	.05328	.74663*	.15836	.12173
11	.13014	.00628	.75916*	.06577	.11182
12	.43511	.29024	.00295	.18856	.14576
13	.50058	.10190	.04244	.10297	.12391
14	.71313*	.11697	.06279	.08586	.03156
15	.71094*	.12702	.04392	.10725	.00456
16	.71622*	.14401	.05486	-.00665	-.07086
17	.84129*	.10522	.07343	-.03177	-.11760
18	.72408*	.07000	.00784	-.05474	-.07277
19	.07496	.62108*	.07836	.12048	-.05680
20	.09496	.77065*	.06492	.15066	-.01837
21	.12960	.83166*	.06617	.11260	.00113
22	.22389	.69314*	.02073	.05493	.01583
23	.11720	.23853	.05299	.84235*	.02951
24	.17717	.22111	.08035	.82198*	.09123
25	.07092	.28402	.01188	.25529	.04234
26	-.07555	.03288	.07645	.30017	.01695
27	-.09131	-.00425	.13151	.34872	.10582
28	.07261	.46799	-.07467	.09094	-.02302
29	.19124	.15785	.05016	.70415*	-.00593
30	.14931	.19478	.03115	.64563*	-.00194
Eigenvalue	5.78771	3.63390	2.43208	1.64988	1.38850
% Common Variance	19.2	12.1	8.1	5.5	4.6	49.6 Total

Table 7

Factor Analysis Summary Table

	Situations					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Factors						
perben/gls	20.0	16.6	16.0	17.1	12.1	19.2
res	7.1	10.8	13.0	12.0	20.7	8.1
app	5.7	7.3	6.1	7.6	4.7	4.6
rts	4.0	6.3	4.7	7.3	7.3	5.5
hom	---	---	---	3.3	3.3	---
int	10.9	4.6	8.2	5.2	9.3	12.1
dom	---	3.9	---	---	---	---

Key:

perben/gls - personal benefits and goals

res - resistance

app - apprehension

rts - rights

hom - homophily

int - intimacy

dom - dominance

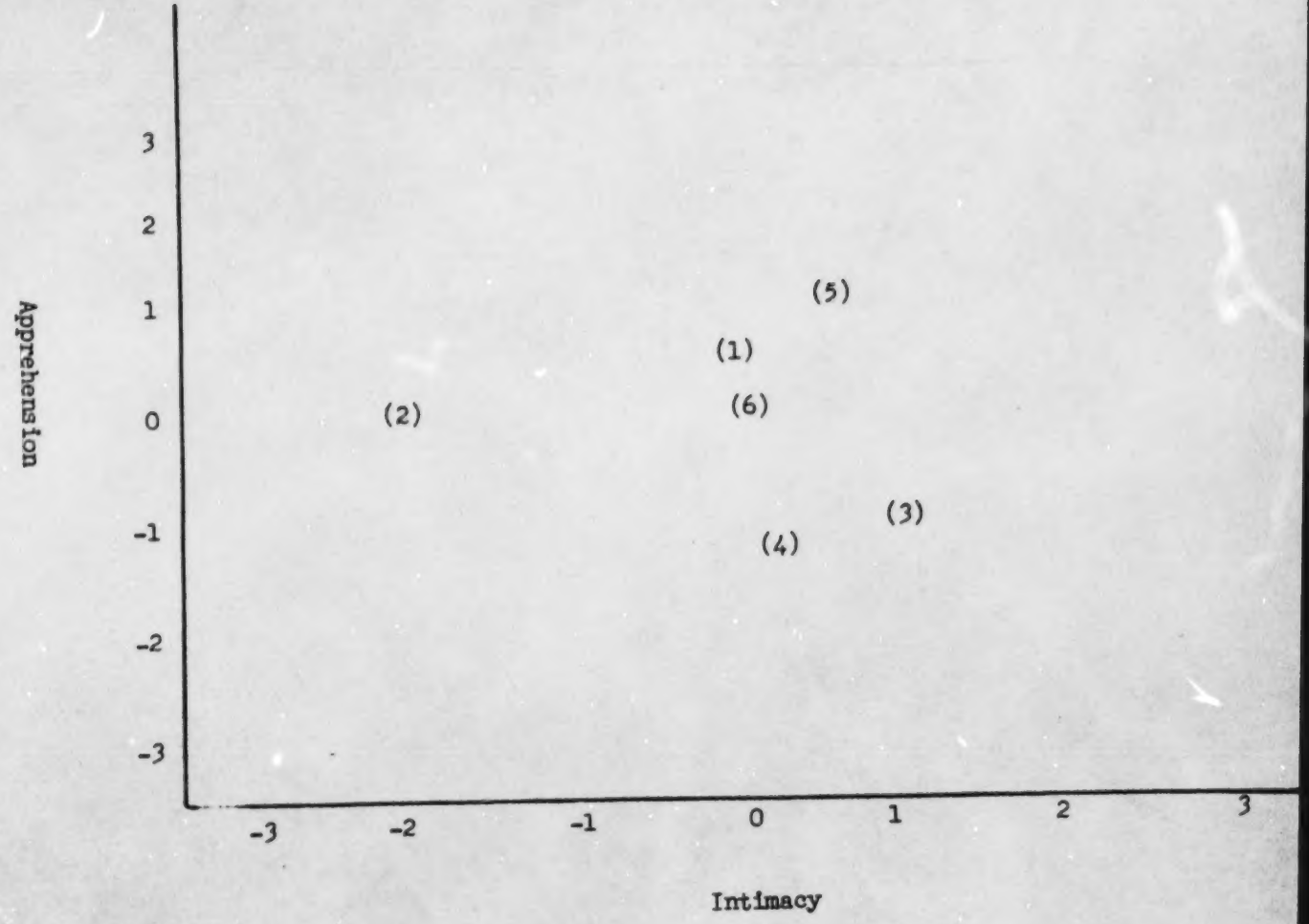
Table 8

Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Func 1	Func 2	Func 3	Func 4	Func 5
perben/gls	-.20098	-.01232	.00620	-.70598	-.15611
res	.07888	-.44347	.53470	.06363	.12781
int	-.84053*	-.35959	.09090	.12766	-.34103
rts	-.48885	.59574	-.18413	-.20002	.26875
app	.08119	-.63784*	-.48257	-.42125	.27212
hom	-.21540	.05010	.49972	-.12461	.70118
dom	.27241	.15891	.45880	-.48548	-.41545

Table 9

Group Centroids



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